In Japan, modern department stores were born at the end of the Meiji period (in the beginning of the 20th century). In order to capture the new middle-class in urban areas as their customers, they adopted various sales promotion strategies, including manipulating fashion trends (e.g., kimono patterns); cultivating new markets such as children’s clothing, furniture and home décor markets while continuously promoting their existing kimono fabrics business; and making good use of special events to drive consumption such as the Girls’ Festival, the Seven-five-three Festival (to celebrate three- and five-year old boys and three- and seven-year old girls) and wedding receptions. On the other hand, the middle class who emerged as new consumers took an easy way to show off their social status by purchasing goods and showcasing their “sophisticated” tastes, which was actually offered by department stores in their early developmental stages. In particular, it is worth noting the great boom of Edo taste created by the sales activities of Mitsukoshi Gofukuten in those days. The middle class migrating from rural to urban areas tried to add spice to their tasteless lives by following the habits of cultural connoisseurs who patronized department stores. Especially, the refined Edo taste of cultural connoisseurs was admired by the middle class, affecting their consumption behaviors.

This phenomenon was most clearly reflected in the popularization of the dolls and tea goods sold by Mitsukoshi Gofukuten from the end of the Meiji period to the early Showa period (from the early to mid-20th century). While focusing on these two kinds of products, this article examines the promotion booklets of Mitsukoshi Gofukuten to analyze how the product design was changing in the process of popularization of exclusive habits through department stores. Luxury dolls designed for toy connoisseurs were driven out by reasonable ones for the general public while department stores were promoting the sales of hina dolls for the Girls’ Festival. Refined tea ceremony goods designed for the elite were also replaced by reasonable tea utensils and related goods (collectively called “hobby goods”) for the general public through buyers’ clubs. What was in common between them was that the aesthetic sense of exclusive communities preserving Edo taste was transformed into a standardized symbolic form easy to understand for everyone and became commercialized to ensure easy access for the public in the process of popularization. This is considered an important aspect for the analysis of mass consumption design after the modern times.
Key words: Habit/taste, department store, doll, sophisticated, kitsch